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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NEPAD MEETING SIDESTEPS ZIMBABWE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASON 1.5 (D.)

¶11. (C) Summary: Despite high-level attendance (including nine Heads of State), the March 26 NEPAD Summit did not produce any dramatic developments; the meeting was basically a planning session. The final communique was silent on Zimbabwe. However, Summit discussions and public statements by key participants criticized the West for being more concerned about that country than other African states, including chronic trouble spots, and for threatening to withhold cooperation from NEPAD due to disagreements between the West and Africa over how to handle Zimbabwe's political crisis. The Summit reviewed draft action plans on Political Governance and Economic Governance, both with peer review mechanisms. Draft plans were also considered in the critical areas of Agriculture, Infrastructure, Capital Flows, and Human Development (Health and Education). The draft plans are not scheduled to be finalized until July, which will be too late to inform G-8 discussions on Africa during the June meeting in Canada. End Summary.

¶12. (C) During a luncheon hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner, Ambassador Jeter got a read-out of the Summit from Nigerian officials seconded to the NEPAD secretariat: Ambassador Isaac Aluko Alokun, Sola

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Akinabe, and Sunday Dogonyaro. (With Canada hosting the G-8, Prime Minister Chretien is scheduled to arrive in Abuja next week for talks with Obasanjo and other African Heads of State to discuss the relationship between NEPAD and the contemplated G-8 Action Plan for Africa.)

ZIMBABWE -- TOO HOT AND PREMATURE TO HANDLE!

¶13. (C) Although the turbulence of Zimbabwe's political crisis loomed over the conference, the Summit communique does not mention the country. However, Zimbabwe was discussed on the margins. According to the Nigerian trio at the luncheon, the discussion on Zimbabwe was awkward, at times difficult. Some Heads of State were piqued by the attention the West focused on Zimbabwe, claiming egregious political events in other African states received but a fraction of the glare directed at Harare. Angola was often cited as an example. The Summiteers thought the attention was not due to any objective standard but because of the UK's patronage of the country's white minority. Almost everyone criticized the pace of Zimbabwean land reform and the UK role in it.

¶14. (C) Several leaders argued the inappropriateness of raising Zimbabwe at this forum since the Mugabe government had not yet joined NEPAD. With few exceptions, the Summiteers did not want NEPAD, at such an early stage in its development, to enmesh itself in this controversy. Here, the participants had a procedural out.

¶15. (C) As the communique indicates, the document creating the African Peer Review Mechanism is a draft that needs to be finalized at the next meeting of the Peer Review Steering Committee. This meeting is several months away. Because the peer review mechanism is still a work in progress, Summiteers who did not want to condemn Harare argued that consideration of Zimbabwe was premature and improper because there was no agreed mechanism by which to conduct the review. During a rather heated exchange

between the Algerian and Portuguese Ambassadors at a March 27 dinner Ambassador Jeter also attended, the Algerian expressed consternation at what he termed Western attempts to link NEPAD's viability to Zimbabwe. He claimed that resolving political crises like Zimbabwe was not the main thrust of NEPAD. In any event, Zimbabwe was not ripe for discussion until the peer review mechanism had been adopted. This position, he said, would be explained by the African leaders at the G-8 Summit. (Comment: The subtext of the Nigerian trio and the Algerian envoy's statements was that most participants opposed discussion of Zimbabwe because they did not want to be seen as succumbing to Western pressure. Obasanjo struck this tone in a public statement made on the eve of the NEPAD Summit, which Ambassador Aluko Alokun said grew out of Obasanjo's frustrations at the London Commonwealth meeting. In a not so oblique reference to Zimbabwe, Obasanjo criticized the West for threatening to distance itself from NEPAD because of dissatisfaction with the conduct of one single African country. Obasanjo claimed this pressure was, in effect, an attempt to "take "NEPAD away from Africa." End Comment.)

16. (C) The NEPAD secretariat officials at the luncheon explained that the Heads of State did not view NEPAD as a new organization but an initiative under the aegis of the OAU/AU. Once the peer review mechanism was finalized by NEPAD it would go to the OAU for final adoption. Only when adopted by the OAU, would it have any binding force. Currently, the basic outline for the review mechanism calls for a technical committee in NEPAD to assess members' good governance and social development against agreed upon standards. Based on these assessments, the technical committee will prepare country reports on member-states. Actions against misbehaving or non-performing states, including sanctions, are to be decided, through a political process, at the Head of State level. (Comment: The scenario painted by the NEPAD staff assumes universal acceptance of the review mechanism. The legal status of the mechanism, should any OAU/AU member oppose its adoption as an unwarranted interference in domestic affairs, is a question that may not have been asked or answered at the Summit. End Comment.)

A NEW APPROACH, BUT SOME OLD RHETORIC

17. (SBU) There was noticeably more West-bashing emanating from the conference hall than at the previous NEPAD Summit in Abuja last October. President Obasanjo set the stage in a March 25 public statement. After meeting with OAU/AU Secretary General Amara Essy, Obasanjo chastised Western nations for expressing "warm words" but not providing any concrete assistance on debt relief. He vowed that NEPAD would be the product of African leadership, not the dictates of others.

18. (C) A discordance, critical of the West, has been noticeable in Obasanjo's public statements during the past few weeks. Part of this is due to the disagreement over Zimbabwe that, at times became an emotionally charged issue for Obasanjo. Also, Obasanjo is clearly frustrated that, for all of his lobbying and visibility on the world stage, coupled with his decision to stake out a basically pro-Western foreign policy, he has not landed more tangible assistance for Nigeria, particularly on his pet issue of debt relief. Additionally, domestic pressures now are escalating as elections approach and the economy sputters. Obasanjo's nature is to blame others when the chips do not fall as he hoped. Nigeria has come up short but, in his mind, the responsibility belongs to others. Usually, he blames domestic opponents. This time, the confluence of Zimbabwe, the UN Monterrey conference, and NEPAD made the creditor Western democracies too attractive a collective target to ignore. Additionally, the early March suspension of a formal IMF-GON program, billed here as Nigeria showing the IMF the exit door in order to develop a home-grown reform package fits into the anti-West posturing.

19. (C) Obasanjo's outburst might be the result of

temporary pique due to this convergence of events. He often deviates from script when annoyed and these forays sometimes yield regrettable statements. However, with political and economic pressures mounting around him, it is likely this rhetoric will continue.

WHAT NEXT FOR NEPAD

¶10. (C) In addition to the Political Governance action plan (Political Peer Review) there is also an Economic and Corporate Governance plan and Peer Review Mechanism intended to encourage governmental best practices in economics and finance in order promote private sector growth and investment. Also, to promote "fast track" development, the Summit reviewed action plans in the following sectors:

-- Agriculture and Market Access;
-- Infrastructure (Information and Communication Technologies, Water and Sanitation, Transportation and Energy);
--Capital Flows; and
-- Human Development (Education and Health, particularly HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases).

¶11. (C) The NEPAD Secretariat officials stated that the Political Governance draft action plan was more developed than the other draft plans but none was complete. They did not expect completion and final adoption until July. The next NEPAD Summit will be in Dakar in April. The focus of that meeting will be attracting private sector buy-in to the NEPAD process.

NEPAD AND THE G-8

¶12. (C) The Canadian High Commissioner expressed concern that schedule for finalizing the papers would make it difficult to hold meaningful discussions regarding NEPAD with the G-8 this year. The G-8 wanted to roll out its own Plan of Action for Africa at the June Summit in Canada. As part of this process, the G-8 hoped to meld as much of NEPAD into its deliberations as possible. However, the July date for final adoption of the NEPAD action plans will be too late to inform G-8 discussions in June.

¶13. (U) FYI: the following Heads of State attended the conference:

Abdelaziz Bouteflika - Algeria

Denis Sassou Nguesso - Republic of the Congo

Joaquim Alberto Chissano - Mozambique

Olusegun Obasanjo - Nigeria

Paul Kagame - Rwanda

Abdoulaye Wade - Senegal

Thabo Mbeki - South Africa

Meles Zenawi - Ethiopia

Anerood Jugnauth - Mauritius

In addition, Gabon Vice President Di Ndinge, Egyptian Minister for Foreign Relations and International

Cooperation El-Naga, Malian Foreign Minister Sidibe, OAU Assistant Secretary Generals Lawrence Agubuzu and Said Djinnit, as well as officials from UNECA, ADB and FAO also attended the Summit.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) There were no major breakthroughs at this Summit which, beside the Zimbabwe issue which was not a formal agenda item, was more procedural than substantive. Clearly our belief that the Summit should have made a statement about the Zimbabwean political crisis was opposed by many of the Summiteers and it may be months before the Governance Peer Review Mechanism is in place. In the interim, we should work behind the scenes with some of the prime architects behind NEPAD so that Zimbabwe is subject to review when the time is ripe under the NEPAD schedule.

JETER